



USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SOUTH INDIA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The social media have become all pervasive, interactive and participatory communication sources and resources in modern times. The social media application has become a new way of life in all modern organizations including the educational institutions. The present investigation was carried out in South India to evaluate the uses and gratifications of social media among the university students. Scientific survey research methodology was adopted for the purpose of gathering primary data. The present investigation was carried out on the theoretical foundation offered by Ess with respect to social media ethics. The study reveals that social media have enabled the university students to pursue higher education on the basis of social network development and timely interaction with the teachers, researchers and fellow students. The study further indicates that social media were satisfactory means for socialization and academic advancement. The study recommends that the higher educational institutions should explore new avenues and opportunities for judicious and creative use of social media for educational development.

PREAMBLE:

The social media have become all pervasive, interactive and participatory communication sources and resources in modern times. The technological factors (increased broadband availability, the improvement of software tools and the development of more powerful computers and mobile devices), social factors (rapid uptake of social media by younger age groups), economic factors (increasing affordability of computers and software and growing commercial interest in the social media sites) and political factors (increasing political mobilization and several political changes) have boosted the social media revolution. The social media application has become a new way of life in all modern organizations including the educational institutions. The specialists have explored new avenues for better social media application in higher educational institutions. The social networking sites range from general-purpose tools for the generic community of interest to highly specialized tools for the support of learning in higher educational environment. The present study evaluated the uses and gratifications of social networking sites among university students in South India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The higher educational institutions have also encouraged greater utilization of social networking sites for educational communication. Adequate studies are not conducted in India on the access, uses and gratifications of social networking sites among the stakeholders of higher education. Prominent studies concerning the present topic of investigation include – Reffay and Chanier (2002:12), Yang and Tang (2003:18), Igarashi, et. al. (2005:05), Knight (2006:07), Llicardi et. al. (2007:10), So and Brush (2008:14), Ess (2009:04), Ellison et. al. (2009:03), Krischner and Karpinski (2010:08), Collin et. al. (2011:01), Khan (2012:06), Tess (2013:16), Kuppaswamy and Narayan (2014:09), Rashid (2015:11), Willard (2016:17), Donelan (2016:02), Sinha (2017:13) and Stanley (2017:15). The review of literature clearly indicates that access to social networking sites, use patterns of social networking sites, practical uses of social networking sites and gratifications of social networking sites with reference to students and other stakeholders of higher education in India are not examined by the past researchers adequately.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The social networking sites are widely used in educational institutions in India and abroad. A majority of the students in India make use of social networking sites for various purposes including enhancement of knowledge. Studies have revealed that interactions between students were most often primarily between existing friends rather than producing it. Similar to our knowledge about the types of social networking sites used, knowledge about the extent of use within educational institutions is quite limited. The impact of social networking sites is not comprehensively understood by the various stakeholders of higher educational development in modern times. Adequate scientific investigations are required to contribute new knowledge about the uses and gratifications of social networking sites with special reference to South Indian students who are pursuing higher education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present investigation was carried out on the basis of following specific

objectives. They include:

1. To assess the access to social networking sites to the university students in South India.
2. To evaluate the uses of social networking sites' among university students in South India.
3. To study the gratifications of social networking sites' among university students in South India.

Conceptual Framework:

Ess (2009) examined the issues and concerns of social media ethics with reference to education and laid a foundation for meaningful application of social media in the field of higher education. The scholar suggested that social networking sites should be used judiciously as the learners and teachers should be encouraged to reflect on how to deal with challenges connected to social networking sites in education. The present investigation was carried out on the theoretical foundation offered by Ess with respect to social media ethics.

Research Design:

The major objective of the present study was to examine the uses and gratifications of social networking sites among university students in South India who are pursuing higher education. The access to social networking sites, use pattern of social networking sites, practical uses of social networking sites and gratifications of social networking sites were systematically evaluated from the point of view of higher education management. The present study was planned and conducted in three stages. In the first stage, a pilot study was conducted in order to examine the feasibility and appropriateness of the tools and procedures of the study. In the second stage, questionnaire was developed and perfected in order to collect authentic primary data from the university students in South India. In the third stage, appropriate scientific statistical analysis procedures were followed to ensure systematic data analysis and interpretation. Overall, the present study approached the problem through a systematic survey method which fits into the context of the investigation. Primary data were gathered from about 436 students who are pursuing higher education in humanities, science, management, engineering and medical courses. Incidental sampling, stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques were followed in selecting the respondents. Findings of the Study

Uses of Social Media:

- Social media were used to develop social network (74.31%).
- Social media were used to interact with teachers, researchers and fellow students (71.10%).
- Social media were used to obtain articles, videos and other study materials (59.17%).
- Social media were used to share ideas and experience with academicians and learners (73.85%).

- Social media were used to meet new people in the academic and social environments (68.81%).
- Social media were used to consult the specialists and seniors in times of need (65.14%).
- Social media were used to monitor academic trends and developments and gain deeper insights (63.30%).
- Social media were used to remain academically and socially active and efficient (76.15%).
- Social media were used to ensure better learning from others, reflection, story sharing and facilitating connections among people (66.97%).
- Social media were used to consolidate personal learning in an informal learning network (62.84%).
- Social media were used to incorporate better academic ideas into personality development (62.39%).
- Social media were used to create a community of learners following learning events (54.13%).
- Social media were used to manage class discussions out of class and obtain additional information (55.05%).
- Social media were used to put all the student assignments and other events on the calendar (55.96%).
- Social media were used to organize academic schedules among teachers and students (64.68%).
- Social media were used to construct academic knowledge through reading and participating in the blog sphere (55.05%).
- Social media were used to share daily information on resources and tools for academic progress (60.09%).
- Social media were used to access to leaders in the field and potential for professional development (51.38%).

Gratifications of the Social Media:

- Social media were satisfactory learning platforms (81.65%).
- Social media were satisfactory means for socialization (73.39%).
- Social media were satisfactory tools of effective academic networking and interaction (74.77%).
- Social media were satisfactory instruments of intervention for research endeavors (65.14%).
- Social media were satisfactory platforms for personality development opportunities (70.18%).
- Social media were satisfactory sources of integration of the curriculum and mainstream of academic life (64.22%).
- Social media were satisfactory sources of tracking of all the intellectual resources (67.43%).
- Social media were satisfactory resources of self-directed learning for the young generation of learners (66.06%).

Testing of Hypotheses:

- H1.** The university students in South India have not gained adequate benefits from the social networking sites.

The data which are presented in the thesis clearly reveal that the social media were useful to the university students of South India. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

- H2.** The university students in South India have not derived any satisfaction from the services of social networking sites.

The data which are presented in the thesis clearly reveal that the social media services were satisfactory to the university students of South India. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

Implications of the Study:

The stakeholders of education should develop necessary man power and infrastructural facilities to promote absolute digital literacy from primary to university levels.

- The higher educational institutions are required to prepare grounds for the optimum use of social media for participatory, inclusive and integrated educational development.
- The higher educational institutions should explore new avenues and opportunities for judicious and creative use of social media for educational development.
- The higher educational institutions should motivate the learners to use social media as complimentary tools of learning.
- The higher educational institutions should harness the potentials of social media for educational progress.
- The higher educational institutions should use social media for better social networking and social capital development.
- The higher educational institutions should create a balance between social media association and academic activities.
- The higher educational institutions should guide the students to ensure judicious use of social media and prevent negative addiction of social media.
- The higher educational institutions should promote the new generation of social media content producers to add real-world knowledge to their learning and the course in general.
- The higher educational institutions should enable the students to gain mastery over social media application and achieve success in their academic pursuits.
- The higher educational institutions should ensure the meaningful inclusion of social media in the higher-level academic courses.
- The higher educational institutions should encourage the teachers to design and incorporate social media activities into their course syllabi.
- The higher educational institutions should use new social media class room approaches that extend and enhance teacher-student interactions.
- The higher educational institutions should enable the visiting faculties and other resource persons to participate in the sharing of knowledge by using social media.
- The higher educational institutions should develop social media ethics in order to promote better culture of learning and social networking.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

The present investigation was carried out to examine the access, uses and gratifications of social media with reference to the university students of South India. The study has revealed certain interesting and relevant findings academically. But, during the course of the study, it is understood that there are many areas which could be considered for scientific evaluation by the future generation of researchers. The educational utility and relevance of social media sites and their contents could be subjected to systematic content analysis in future. The role of social media in communication skill development, personality development, social mobility, social network development, social capital development, political mobilization, social transformation, political transformation, crisis management, disaster management, leadership development, entrepreneurship development, sustainable development, corporate communication, business management and other processes could also be subjected to scientific evaluation in future.

CONCLUSION:

The social media have grown commendably in the new millennium as the effective participatory communication and development sources and resources. The social media have become effective means which have initiated critical bonds with the stakeholders of development in all spheres of human life. The social media play an important role in everyday life for academicians, researchers and students in the modern educational institutions. The social media have also become creative and useful source of higher education. The use of social media, multiplicity of social media, relevance of social media and competitiveness of the market are bound to increase in future. The social media have become active facilitators of higher education in the present times. They have also ensured better social mobility and connectivity in the world. The students have incorporated social media in their daily lives. The social media have brought about integrated learning regardless of space and time. The universities, research centers, development institutions, publication houses and other higher educational institutions should make necessary arrangements for the optimum utilization of social media. The social media have also emerged as complementary sources of knowledge, experience and expertise for the students, researchers and teachers. The stakeholders of higher education should also examine the positive and negative impact of social media on the students and ensure meaningful checks and balances for optimum and responsible use of social media for higher educational

development in India.

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